ISSUE 07 | FEBRUARY 2018

ARANYA

HYDERABAD BIRDING PALS | FRIENDS OF FLORA & FAUNA

Editors
Ajinkya Supekar
Sriram Reddy
Phani Krishna Ravi
Gopalakrishna Iyer
Ashis Kumar Pradhan
Hari Krishna Adepu
Abhishek Ravindra

Proofing
Husein Latif

Content Contributors
Ashis Kumar Pradhan
Ajinkya Supekar
Naveen Sama
RK Balaji
Arun Verghese
Mohit Joshi
Manjoy Lourembam
Harikrishna Adepu

Cover Image
Heart Spotted Woodpecker
By Guru Raju

Back Cover
Malabar Trogon
By Sriram Reddy

Images used are the copyright of photographers

Hyderabad Birding Pals

For Feedback, Contributions or More Information, Please contact us

hyderabadbirdingpals@gmail.com

www.hyderabadbirdingpals.com

HyderabadBirdingPals

HBP Birdwalks

In this issue

The first month of 2018 proved to be a fruitful one, HBP organised four bird walks in January with some good sightings like Ferruginous ducks at Osman sagar, Eastern Orphean warbler at Ameenpur and the Black-winged cuckooshrike at Gubbala Mangamma. It was a delight seeing large numbers of Black headed buntings at Manjeera dam. The team explored new potential bird watching hotspots such as Sirnapalle, Jalleru Dam and Koilkonda.

This month too a HBP photographer & team member will reveal what he carries in his camera bag. A travelogue of Rollapadu wildlife sanctuary gives you a feel of the savanna. Notable sightings of the month and some of the best shots taken by HBP members are published as well for your viewing pleasure.

Do have a good time reading this issue. As always we welcome your feedback.

Happy Birding
Ajinkya Supekar

Hyderabad Birding Pals (HBP) is a group of bird watching enthusiasts based out of Hyderabad, united by a common love for birds. We organize free bird walks around the city of Hyderabad that are open to participation by all like-minded individuals. We are an informal group, who are passionate about bird watching and photography, learning about bird behavior (in the field) and doing our bit towards conservation of nature and its habitat as well. Do check our Facebook group to stay up to date on our bird watching events.

ARANYA
CONTENTS

	Page
January Birdwalks	04
Birdwalk Trip Reports	06
What's in my Camera Bag	23
Rollapadu Travelogue	30
New Places Explored by HBP in January	34
Notable Sightings	38
Photographer's Corner	45

January Bird Walks

184th Bird Walk | Manjeera Dam
7th January 2018

185st Bird Walk | Osman Sagar
14th January 2018

186nd Bird Walk | Ameenpur Lake
21st January 2018

187rd Bird Walk | Gubbala Mangamma
26th and 27th January 2018

Manjeera Dam Trip Report

By Naveen Sama

184th Bird Walk at Manjeera Dam
07th January 2018

Manjeera wildlife sanctuary (17.65°N, 78.07°E) is a wildlife sanctuary and reservoir located in Sangareddy district around 50 Km away from Hyderabad. Originally a crocodile sanctuary, today it is home to more than 100 species of birds and vulnerable Mugger Crocodile (*Crocodylus palustris*). The reservoir, located in the sanctuary, provides drinking water to the twin cities i.e. Hyderabad and Secunderabad, and is a place for many winter migratory birds. Manjeera has always surprised us with sightings in the last year a few of them being, the Brown hawk-owl or Brown boobook (*Ninox scutulata*), Black capped Kingfisher (*Halcyon pileata*), Indian Blue Robin (*Larvivora brunnea*), and the Western Reef Egret (*Egretta gularis*).

This was our first bird walk of 2018, and a team of 23 HBP members gathered at the Allwyn cross roads by 6:15 AM and started off towards our destination with a short stop for an early breakfast and a briefing on species in the area and sighting locations. On reaching the destination we had a grand inauguration of Sriram's majestic new Nikon 600mm prime lens followed by a group photograph and we formed groups. One group headed towards the farm lands, another group towards the backwaters and our group consisting of Sriram Reddy, Ashis Kumar Pradhan, Gopalakrishna Iyer & myself headed to the reservoir area. A sighting that was high on my wishlist was to see the Bluethroat (*Luscinia svecica*), it is a winter visitor since the previous year and soon we encountered a female bluethroat in the farm lands on our way.

While heading back I was lucky enough to spot a Bluethroat (*Luscinia svecica*) doubly rewarding our efforts.

Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica*
By RK Balaji

The approach road to the Manjeera reservoir from the Temple arch was filled with large numbers of Red headed buntings (*Emberiza bruniceps*) and small flocks of Black Headed Buntings (*Emberiza melanocephala*). Soon the entire team was engrossed with these beautiful birds, moving ahead near the farmland we sighted a brown crake or brown bush-hen (*Amaurornis akool*), Yellow Eyed Babbler (*Chrysomma sinense*), Hoopoe (*Upupa epops*). We headed further to water stream and we were welcomed by a Black Bittern (*Ixobrychus flavicollis*) and a Yellow Bittern (*Ixobrychus sinensis*).

Soon we spotted a Red avadavat/red munia/strawberry finch (*Amandava amandava*) that got our attention while it basked in the early morning sun.

Red Avadavat *Amandava amandava*
By Ashish Kumar Pradhan

We then moved further ahead to the water streams looking for the Black Capped Kingfisher & Western Reef Egret, Ashis and Gopal were lucky enough to spot the Western Reef Egret.

Western Reef Egret *Egretta gularis*
By Ashish Kumar Pradhan

Abrar, Sekhar Vishvanath and team joined us, and we reviewed sightings and headed towards the other side of the dam where we were accompanied by Arjun and a few other team members.

We also met BNHS team member Ramesh Kumar who was in Hyderabad for a bird census.

One of our teammates Arjun, got us permission from the Forest department to pay a visit to the island in the reservoir, a team of 10 people were escorted by boat to the island. Our journey started off with a western reef egret passing above us with a Bronze winged jacana (*Metopidius indicus*), Purple swamphen (*Porphyrio porphyrio*), and Western Yellow wagtail (*Motacilla flava*), White-browed wagtail (*Motacilla maderaspatensis*) and Citrine Wagtails (*Motacilla citreola*) around the dam gates. It took us 30 minutes to reach the island, enroute we had a picturesque view of the reservoir, backwaters, farms lands and surrounding areas. We encountered Mugger Crocodiles (*Crocodylus palustris*), Asian Openbill (*Anastomus oscitans*) and Painted storks (Mycteria leucocephala). The entire island was filled with roosting birds. A special thanks to Arjun for the island trip, it's a must visit place.

Black-headed Bunting *Emberiza melanocephala*
By Abhishek Ravindra

We continued our birding around the green belt near the dam and soon spotted a Forest Wagtail (*Dendronanthus indicus*) that was hopping around and gave us ample time to click. Tickell's blue flycatcher (*Cyornis tickelliae*), and the Chestnut Tailed Starling (*Sturnia malabarica*) were among a few other important sightings.

We all gathered at the Sanctuary office by 12PM and wrapped up the bird walk with a total of 120 sightings and adding 4 lifers to my kitty.

https://ebird.org/view/checklist/S41700652

Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybrida*
By Subrata Kool

Red-headed Bunting *Emberiza bruniceps*
By Ashis Kumar Pradhan

Forest Wagtail Dendronanthus indicus
By RK Balaji

Purple-rumped Sunbird *Leptocoma zeylonica*
By Ashis Kumar Pradhan

Yellow Bittern *Ixobrychus sinensis*
By Manjoy Lourembam

Black Bittern Ixobrychus flavicollis
By Ashis Kumar Pradhan

Red-headed Bunting *Emberiza bruniceps*
By Sriram Reddy

Osman Sagar Trip Report

By RK Balaji

185th Bird Walk at Osman Sagar
14st January 2018

Gandipet lake also known as Osman Sagar is located on the outskirts of Hyderabad, about 20 kilometres away from the centre of the city. It was constructed during the reign of the last Nizam of Hyderabad, Osman Ali Khan, hence its name, and is built as a dam for the Musi River on the west of Hyderabad, The lake is spread across 46 square kilometres and is a major source of drinking water that is supplied to the people of Hyderabad and Secunderabad.

Every season brings its own unique sightings of birds and this is the time for the migratory waders in particular to water bodies like Gandipet. 5:30am was the meeting time at Appa Junction. The weather was cloudy and humid. We reached Chilkur and took a left turn towards to reach the backwaters of the lake. As we were still early we spent some time tuning in to the calls of active birdlife in the area. We saw a pair of Indian thick-knees that flew across in front of our car. There was a good activity of Munias, and Robins in the area and we also spotted two species of weavers - Baya and the Streak Throated on our way. Many birds in mixed flocks were foraging on the tender seeds of paddy in the fields. In a bush along the road, yellow-eyed Babblers and large-grey babblers were seen dashing through, keenly looking for insects. Purple sunbirds, Asian Pied Starlings and Ashy Prinias were also seen.

We parked the vehicles and looked for other species based on their calls near the dead tree. It was nice to see the surroundings of the lake being lush green and visually see the change in habitat. We spotted a grey francolin family (4 to 5) on the wall that is left unconstructed on the left side, observed some sandgrouse at the same spot that flew away when we tried to approach. Heard the call of short-eared owls from farm on the left side. Finally we reached the bank; this is where we saw a large number of migratory birds. On the banks and in the water we could see many flocks of winter visiting ducks and resident coots. As some ducks flew suddenly out of the group we cross checked their ID using a bird guide, the features matched the Ferruginous duck/pochard (*Aythya nyroca*). Ferruginous ducks are partially migratory. Winter migration occurs from early September to mid-October. The migration to the breeding grounds takes place from March onwards. The IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) has listed them as "Near Threatened". (Source: indianbirds). Other sightings from this outing included a big flock of northern pintail, Gadwall, Northern shoveler, Spot-billed duck, Lesser whistling duck, Oriental Darter, Glossy Ibis, Red-naped Ibis, Siberian stonechat, Blyth's reed warbler, Booted warbler, Bronze-winged Jacana, Indian Roller, Red-rumped Swallows, Red Avadavat, Indian Silverbill and River Terns.

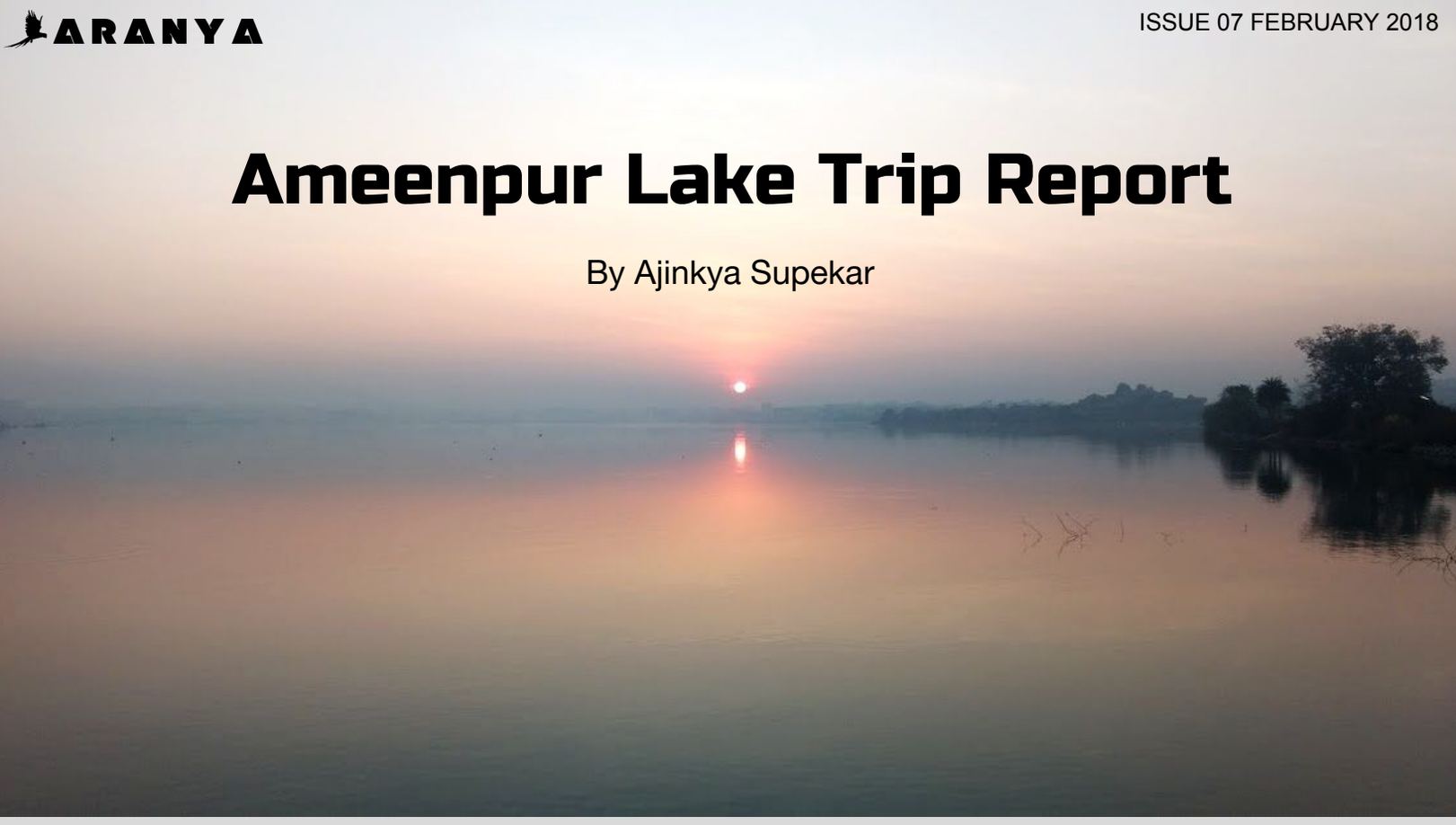
On reaching where we had parked our car, we saw reed warblers and a Eurasian hoopoe beside the paddy field. Later on as we drove on we noticed Tawny pipit, Paddy field pipit, Oriental skylark, Sykes lark, Ashy crowned sparrow lark and the Rufous tailed lark . Overall it was a decent bird-walk with nice sightings. A total of 100+ species were reported along with a rare and special sighting of the Ferruginous Pochard/ Ferruginous duck. https://ebird.org/view/checklist/S41889023

ID shot of Ferruginous duck *Aythya nyroca* By Sourav Das

Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris* and Siberian Stonechat *Saxicola maurus* By RK Balaji

Ameenpur Lake Trip Report

By Ajinkya Supekar



186th Bird Walk at Ameenpur Lake
21st January 2018

Ameenpur lake (17.52°N, 78.32°E) is a water body in the outskirts of Hyderabad. It has long been a favorite bird watching spot for city dwellers. It is a lake system with many small lakes interconnected with it. Due to urbanization, the lake system has been exploited and affected by human activities. Efforts for its conservation has lead to it getting the distinction of being the first water body in the country to be declared a Biodiversity Heritage Site. More than 200 bird species are reported on ebird from this hotspot.

This year the lake is brimming with water and the water level has not reduced much. Therefore the waterfowl have stayed away from the lake. Apart from the waterbody, there is a smaller lake, scrubland and paddy fields near the lake. Exploring these areas makes a good bird watching session.

A beautiful sunrise greeted us when we reached the lake. On a perch a Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* looked over the water for a fish to come up and be grabbed. Spot billed Pelicans *Pelecanus philippensis* glided down and came towards the trail of sunlight glittering off the water to give a lovely view.

Looking for birds on the bund

We started to walk on the bund. To our right, bird activity was picking up. In the bushes along the bund, Reed Warblers, Blyth's Reed Warblers *Acrocephalus dumetorum* and Clamorous Reed Warblers *Acrocephalus stentoreus* were in good numbers. Also, many Booted Warblers *Iduna caligata* called frequently as they scanned through the bushes, occasionally picking something from ground. And of course, Ashy prinias *Prinia socialis* claimed the bushes with their quick moves and aggressive calls.

There were paddy fields filled with water coming from the lake. There were many Wood Sandpipers *Tringa glareola* and Indian Pond-Herons *Ardeola grayii*. We could also see Western Yellow Wagtails *Motacilla flava*, White Wagtail *Motacilla alba* and White-browed Wagtails *Motacilla maderaspatensis*. The moment a Brown Crake *Zapornia akool* saw us on the bund, it dashed to the thick reeds lining the fields. Few Bluethroats *Luscinia svecica* were there too.

As we moved ahead, everyone dispersed in groups. The smaller lake ahead had some waterfowl, Ruddy Shelducks *Tadorna ferruginea*, Garganeys *Spatula querquedula*, Northern Shovelers *Spatula clypeata*, Indian Spot-billed Ducks *Anas poecilorhyncham*, Northern Pintails *Anas acuta* and Lesser Whistling-Duck *Dendrocygna javanica*. Near the boulders, Red Avadavats *Amandava amandava*, female of Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros* and Gray-breasted Prinias *Prinia hodgsonii* were seen.

Another group went to the scrub area and got Eastern Orphean Warbler *Sylvia crassirostris*, which is the first record of it from this hotspot on ebird

Green Bee-eater *Merops orientalis* and Long-tailed Shrike *Lanius schach* By Sriram Reddy

A total of 107 species were reported in this bird walk. Here's the link to the ebird checklist, https://ebird.org/view/checklist/S42116171

Eastern Orphean Warbler *Sylvia crassirostris*
By Mangesh Singh Thakur

Gubbala Mangamma Trip Report

By Arun Verghese

187th Bird Walk at Gubbala Mangamma 26th and 27th January 2018

Owlicious Nocturnal Birding!! Woodpeckers!! Malabar Trogon!! Green-billed Malkoha!!

Well, these are the words that come up in my mind when someone asks me to summarize how my 2 days of birding at Gubbala Mangamma turned out to be for me and most of the team.

After going through a lackluster season for me with no outstation trips from Pune, deciding to spend the long weekend with my HBP team was not a tough decision. It just felt Wow to be back with the group that I started birding with.

As with the most long trips, we carpooled and 21 of us set for the long journey from Hyderabad on Thursday evening. The excitement was building among everyone looking forward to spotting many new species, nocturnal birding and so on.

We reached our destination around 2AM, unpacked our luggage and then decided to kick-off for some nocturnal birding. We drove to the temple area, moving at a pace enough to check for any red/yellow eyes peeping from poles, wires or trees, and of course nightjars on the roads.

Having already recorded 11 types of Owls in the Telangana region, the Brown Wood Owl was on everyone's wish list. We however realized that the number of rodents is much less on roads and hence sightings on the roadside was not promising. Nevertheless, we got to see a Barn Owl that flew across the road.

We stopped in between, turned off the engines and lights and it was game on to listen for Owls. We could record Indian and Oriental Scops Owl and Jungle Nightjars.

We finally headed towards our destination and then we decided to plunge into, I would say Owling. It was just so amazing to hear multiple calls from Oriental Scops Owl and plenty more Jungle Owlets. We just realized how good the area was for Owls. Probably, with the temple in vicinity and more garbage waste, rodent population wouldn't be a problem for our night Masters. Most of the group went for a quick power nap around 5AM. We continued our Owling and were waiting for the dawn to kiss the forest scape.

Around 6:30 AM when suddenly the place started to erupt with many Jungle Owlets calling and then the birds were suddenly in action. Other team members started to pop out from their vehicles hearing the commotion, My first bird was a Blue-throated Blue Flycatcher. The area was buzzing with calls from different directions. We decided to venture around the slopes. Many of the team were eagerly awaiting a glimpse of the Malabar Trogon. Soon the birds began perching on tree tops for the morning light and breakfast after a good night's sleep. We got to see Racket Tailed Drongos, Spangled Drongos,

Greater Racket-tailed Drongo *Dicrurus paradiseus*
By Soumyajit Basu

Black-winged Cuckooshrike *Lalage melaschistos*
By Fareed Mohmed

Rosy Minivets and then suddenly there came the ‘drummer’ and then we saw the ‘Flame’ and features revealing it to be the Greater Flameback woodpecker.

Then came another smaller ‘flame’. Well this time it was not a woodpecker. There comes with the dash of scarlet, the Scarlet Minivet. Just how beautiful it is to see such a color moving in a frenzy among the green after the insects; a treat to the eyes. The background calls of Jungle Owlets were resonating from here and there occasionally.

It was around 2PM when a special lunch prepared for the team was almost ready. While everyone was gathering, 50m away there came a hunting pack on one of the trees, and then there came a special visitor the Black-Winged CuckooShrike. Little did it know that its presence bagged it the title of #bigfind, apparently this being the second sighting for Telangana. While there was delicious hot maggi being served the announcement “come, come, quick” made everyone drop their plates and rush to the tree. The irony: While we birders were sacrificing the lunch, busy capturing those moments, the whole hunting party had a wonderful meal up in the trees eating the insects. So, who all were there for the party: Black-hooded Orioles, Black-naped Oriole, White-bellied Drongo, Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpeckers and the star, Black-winged CuckooShrike.

By evening, we were beginning to realise the potential birds of this area and then came in the ‘news update’. Green-billed Malkoha far above on tree canopies. I got a glimpse of its tail and wings. Couple of us decided to climb up the steep hillside. What energy a strong coffee can give to you?

A burst of energy right... Well, that’s exactly what the Malkoha did. Irrespective of the steepness, we reached half-way and with the altitude increasing and energy exhausted, we sat there with a good view of plenty of tree tops and possibly the Malkoha. Though the Malkoha wasn’t spotted again, we got to see some Drongo’s and Oriole’s, we then we started the slippery descent downhill, with the Malkoha in the ‘pending’ list for Day 2.

Day 2

Two of the five car groups decided to visit the nearby Reservoir, to check the waterbody and also adjoining forest for the first half of the day. We started by 5:30 AM and to everyone’s surprise we were enveloped by dense fog. The visibility was hardly 20m and we realized it was going to be a tough morning. We had to trust Google Maps for understanding each turn we took. It was eerie and interesting.

By 6:45 AM, the visibility was much better and we were moving towards the reservoir. Suddenly, we saw a huge tree beside the road ahead of us, with plenty of Rosy Starling. We stopped the vehicle and what we saw was a treat for the eyes. And later when they took off from the tree, it was a blissful moment. They settled down 50m away on another tree. Then another group flew off and then another. Trust me, while they were sitting on tree, we could hardly understand the numbers. Once they flew off, we realized there were around 250+ of them.

We finally reach the reservoir and with least expectation, we moved up the stairs and onto the rim of the reservoir wall. What a sight it was. There lies a vast water body with sun rising from the hills on our right,

Malabar Trogon *Harpactes fasciatus* pair
By Manjula Desai

Black-hooded Oriole *Oriolus xanthornus*
By Sarath Babu Dhulipalla

far in front of us were plenty of trees submerged in the water body with the morning fog still enveloped over it, the sun now evaporating them with its might. On the left were the nearby lands and some few trees and poles submerged in water. There was an Egret sitting a top a log, a Common kingfisher busy hunting, Pond heron walking cautiously on the edges of water looking out for prey, but not much activity apart from that. We then headed towards the nearby forest foothills, driving slowly looking for activity. First was a farmland filled with Ashy WoodSwallow, Brown Shrike's, & Asian Pied Starling.

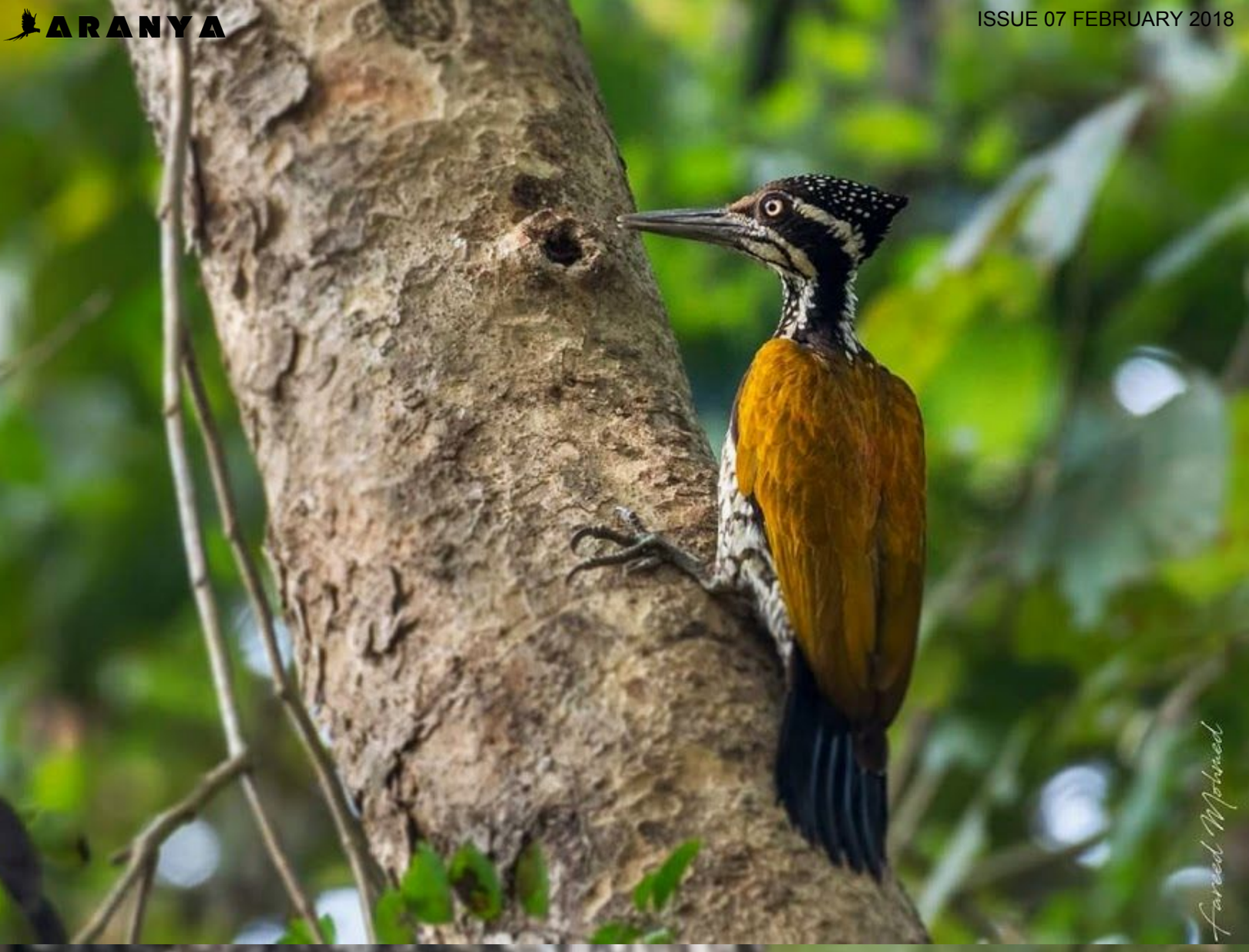
As we approached the foothills, the patch looked promising with Black Hooded Orioles. Suddenly, Sidhu from the other vehicle spotted something. We stopped abruptly and rushed to the point and there was Sirkeer Malkoha hiding on the tree canopy along the slopes; lifers for Ajinkya and Manjula. My 2nd sighting. The excitement just lit up. We went ahead, but gradually came into a village where the tarred road comes to an end. We started our course now to Gubbala Mangamma.

As we entered the forest, our hopes were again high. We stopped at a point where we saw a trail. Ajinkya, Anand, Manjoy, Manjula, Sidhu and myself started to walk into the forest. We were greeted by a bold Blue Throated Blue Flycatcher and a White-rumped Shama. The forest was very lovely, but the activity was a bit dull. We again split up further and we were searching for locations where there was activity. Far away we could hear the cries of Crested Serpent Eagle. We walked in the direction, but failed to find it. We then decided to move a bit down into a dried riverbed. As soon as we got down, there was a fruiting tree alight with activity.

And this time it was 2 Chestnut-headed Bee-eaters. Lifers for Manjula and Manjoy. They were high with excitement. In company with it was a pair of Brown-Capped Pygmy Woodpecker, with its typical pecking up and down the trunk.

Far away, we again heard the Eagle and there it was in the open far off. We took some quick shots. It decided to make us happier by taking a flight over us back into forest. Very shortly, it was replaced by a Spangled Drongo. It was not just sitting, but spreading its tail like a fantail and sitting comfortably. Time and again our focus always for shifted towards Chestnut-headed Bee-eaters who were busy acrobatically chasing the flies from mid-air. Their maneuvers on hunt was a spectacle to watch.

Suddenly, we heard a Jungle Owlet from nearby. Manjoy spotted it far on a tree, but rest of us were unable to find it and it disappeared. But it kept calling tempting us to check further. We decided to leave the Owlet for itself and return. Upon meeting our group members, we realized that we missed a pair of Green-billed Malkoha. With just a glimpse the previous evening and not decent enough shots, we decided to search for it again from the area our members found. We reached and canopy level search started by 5 of us. Anand and Ajinkya were searching it for us. An Ashy Drongo far inside the woods was the point of interest. Suddenly, Ajinkya saw some movements and he had spotted IT. We all waited for movements. In the next 20-30 mins, we witnessed movement among the tree canopies, occasional glimpse of tail or head but far away. Anand managed to get a decent enough image among the clutter. Then it flew towards us and again hid inside the canopy on the tree beside us.



Greater Flameback *Chrysocolaptes guttacristatus* and Indian Nuthatch *Sitta castanea*
By Fareed Mohmed

All of us had got good views of the Malkoha. It then soared over us further behind moving from one canopy to another, always on the hide. The typical calls were being also made by the pair.

Though not successful getting images of the Green-billed Malkoha, but well satisfied with its sightings we returned to the temple area. On reaching there, we learnt from the other 3 groups, that they had wonderful sightings in the morning with Woodpeckers and everything. Personally, my heart sank. But again, then it's all part of Birding. We had our own share of excitement and exploration and being content with what you experience is part of the passion. It's what drives us to visit places again and again.

We again had a wonderful lunch and then it was just 2 hours left, before we packed up back to Hyderabad. One final attempt for the Greater Flameback and it didn't disappoint us. The pair was there in the woods drumming heavily. Finally, we got some decent enough images of the species. Something blue was flying on the canopy, gleaning between the branches and there was the Verditer Flycatcher.

Myself and Manjula, went in search for the Indian Nuthatch on two trees, but it didn't turn up. Finally, all of us decided to pack-up with a Group Pic and sharing each other's sightings.

We got into our cars and started moving away from the temple. And then suddenly Ashis saw a Racket-tailed Drongo inside the forest. We stopped the vehicle and myself, Ashis and Manjula went in to have a last glimpse and possibly get an image of it.

What on earth did we enter was the question popping in our minds. Clueless!! The whole place was teeming with activity.

And this time it was the bigger birds. 3-4 Racket-tailed Drongos, Green-billed Malkoha, some woodpeckers; Ashis spotted a Greater Yellownape, a lifer which I missed by fraction of time. Those 2-3 mins were just like raining of birds for the 3 of us, but we needed to rush back as the rest of cars were waiting for us, and we set off on our journey back to our homes.

Well, that was how 2 days of gettogether at Gubbala Mangamma with our feathered friends turned out to be. For me, coming from Pune and visiting this place and treasuring those moments with my HBP family was the key highlight. There is a reason why this group was formed in the beginning. And looking back at how things are, I can clearly say we as a family have progressed much ahead. Part of being the family is always special and I never miss any big events. Birding with your family is always fun. I just can't wait for the 200th walk to happen to see all of you again.

Ebird Checklists:

Day One

https://ebird.org/view/checklist/S42296552

Day Two

https://ebird.org/view/checklist/S42271130

Black-naped Oriole *Oriolus chinensis*
By Sriram Reddy

What's in My Camera Bag?

By Mohit Joshi

I'm a software professional during the week, and an avid birdwatcher and nature photographer on weekends. I have been passionate about nature and wildlife from my childhood. So when I started photography about two years ago, it was mainly so I could capture images of birds and animals. I have tried my hands in various genres like fashion, Landscapes, Travel and Street. However, wildlife photography still my absolute favorite. For me the journey has just begun. I think I still have much to learn. So when I was asked to write this article, I was skeptical of its impact. But here I am sharing some personal learnings that I've gained all this while, and hope that you will enjoy reading through this months edition of "What's in My Camera bag"

Nikon D5200

The first and only camera body I have owned so far. When I started out without any prior knowledge of photography, I wanted an affordable DSLR camera with a decent set of features. So I invested in this entry level crop sensor Nikon body, which I am still using with no problems whatsoever.

Though it is a pretty basic camera, it produces high quality pictures, with low noise if you can get the exposure right. Auto-focus is decent with 39 AF points, out of which 9 are cross type, which makes it pretty effective in tracking moving subjects.

There are being drawbacks of being an entry level camera like smaller buffer, slower auto-focus and not so great high-ISO performance, but that in no way is a deal breaker once you learn to work around these limitations.

Nikon 200-500 VR

This power performer is the latest addition to my bag. This is the most coveted lens among most amateur wildlife photographers, and for a valid reason. The lens is tack sharp through the focal range. The autofocus is very quick and accurate and the bokeh is beautiful. But the most impressive aspect of this lens is the state of the art Vibration Reduction which allows you to take sharp images at shutter speeds as low as 1/30 sec, handheld. Highest F-stop of 5.6 at 500mm is great for those low light situations, though you may find maximum sharpness at f/7.1 or f/8.0.

Tamron 70-300 VC

My first telephoto which I used for over a year. This lens invalidates two misconceptions photographers have about lenses:

Myth #1 Third-party lenses are junk

The output is great, autofocus quick and pictures sharp and detailed. Vibration Compensation, as Tamron calls it, is very effective. It just freezes the frame once you half-press the shutter. This is one of the better lenses in its class, which I realized after clicking several high quality images.

Myth #2 300 mm focal length is just not good enough for birds and wildlife photography

Believe me, you are never going to have enough focal length for bird photography. You will keep wanting more and more. Only thing that you can do is to do your best with what you have. 70-300mm is a very useful focal-length range to have. In fact some of my favorite wildlife clicks come from this lens. All you need to do is to learn how to get closer to your subject without disturbing it.

Nikon 18-55 VR2

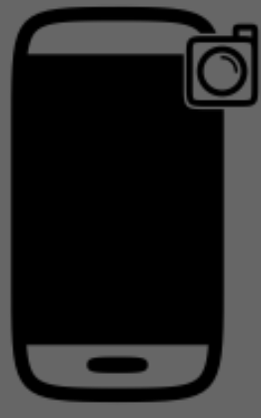
The quintessential kit lens, which can be used for clicking various kinds of scenes – landscapes, street, starscapes, portraits etc. It's not perfect but its versatility makes it a must-carry in every trip. It is dead cheap and a complete bang for one's buck.

Nikon 50mm 1.8 G

My least used lens. That doesn't mean it's not a great lens. This is one of the best prime lenses in its class. Images are sharp, autofocus is bang-on and the color reproduction is just about perfect. This lens is capable of producing some magical artsy shots and portraits. Highest F stop of 1.8 allows you to produce a beautiful shallow depth of field effect and the bokeh is beautiful and creamy. Paired with a Raynox M-250 macro filter, it works like a charm for macros.

Mobile Phone's Camera

Never underestimate your phone's camera. Today, smartphones are capable of taking quality pictures. It's such a hassle changing into a wide angle lens while you are clicking birds with your telephoto. Also you don't carry your camera everywhere all the time. Fret not, it's completely alright to capture those magical moments with your phone.



have about lenses.

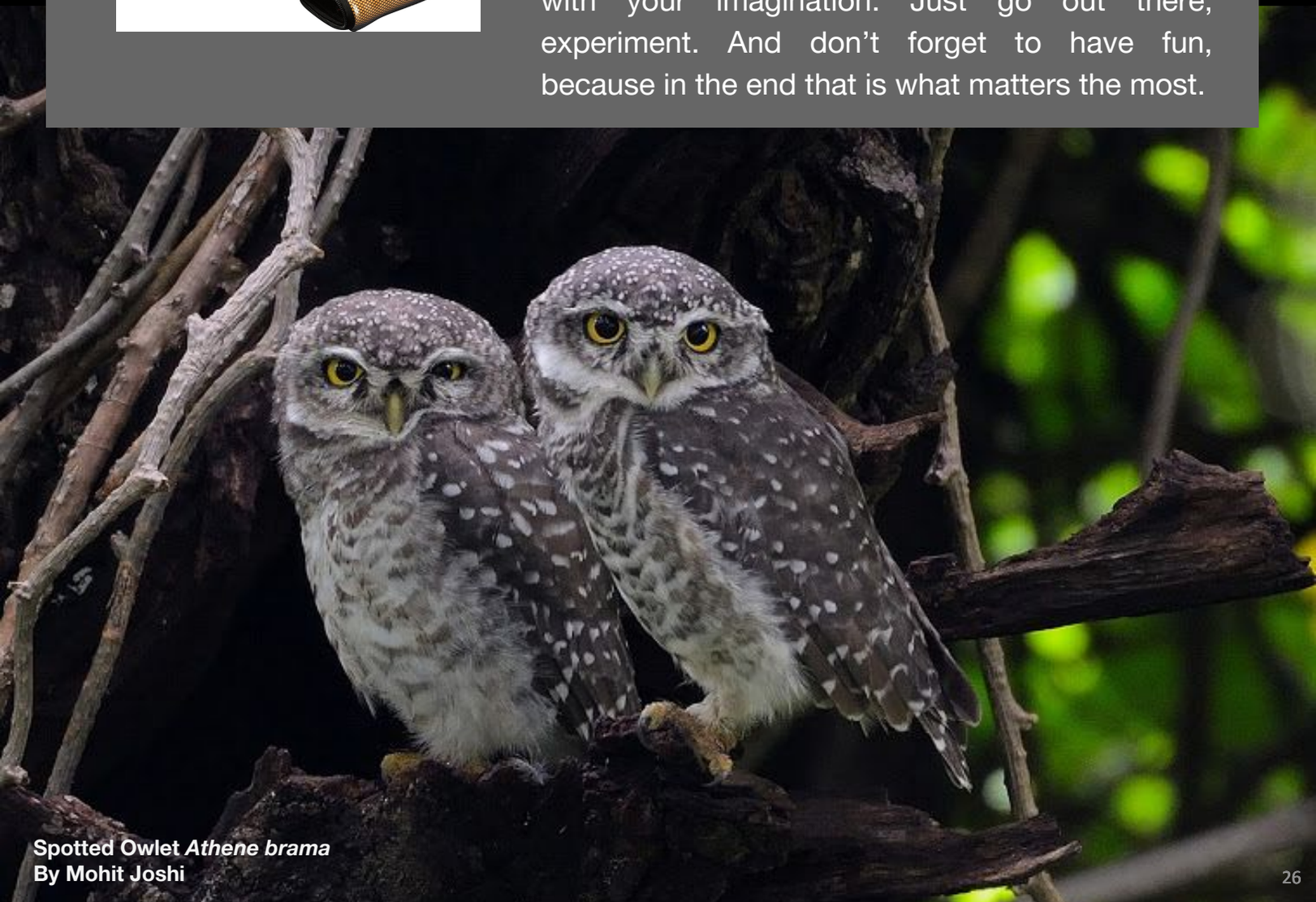
Flashlight

When you are into wildlife, you never know what time of day you are going encounter something wonderful. Once we clicked an Indian Rock Python using just car's headlights. Every now and then I see Spotted owlets and Barn owls after dark. A 3W LED Flashlight has made my camera bag its permanent home now.

AmazonBasics DSLR Bag

Last but not the least, a bag to carry it all. This bag is large enough to hold all the equipment that I've mentioned. It is also affordable, highly customizable and provides ample safety to your equipment.

On a closing note, there is no better equipment for you than the one you own, paired with your imagination. Just go out there, experiment. And don't forget to have fun, because in the end that is what matters the most.



Spotted Owlet *Athene brama*
By Mohit Joshi

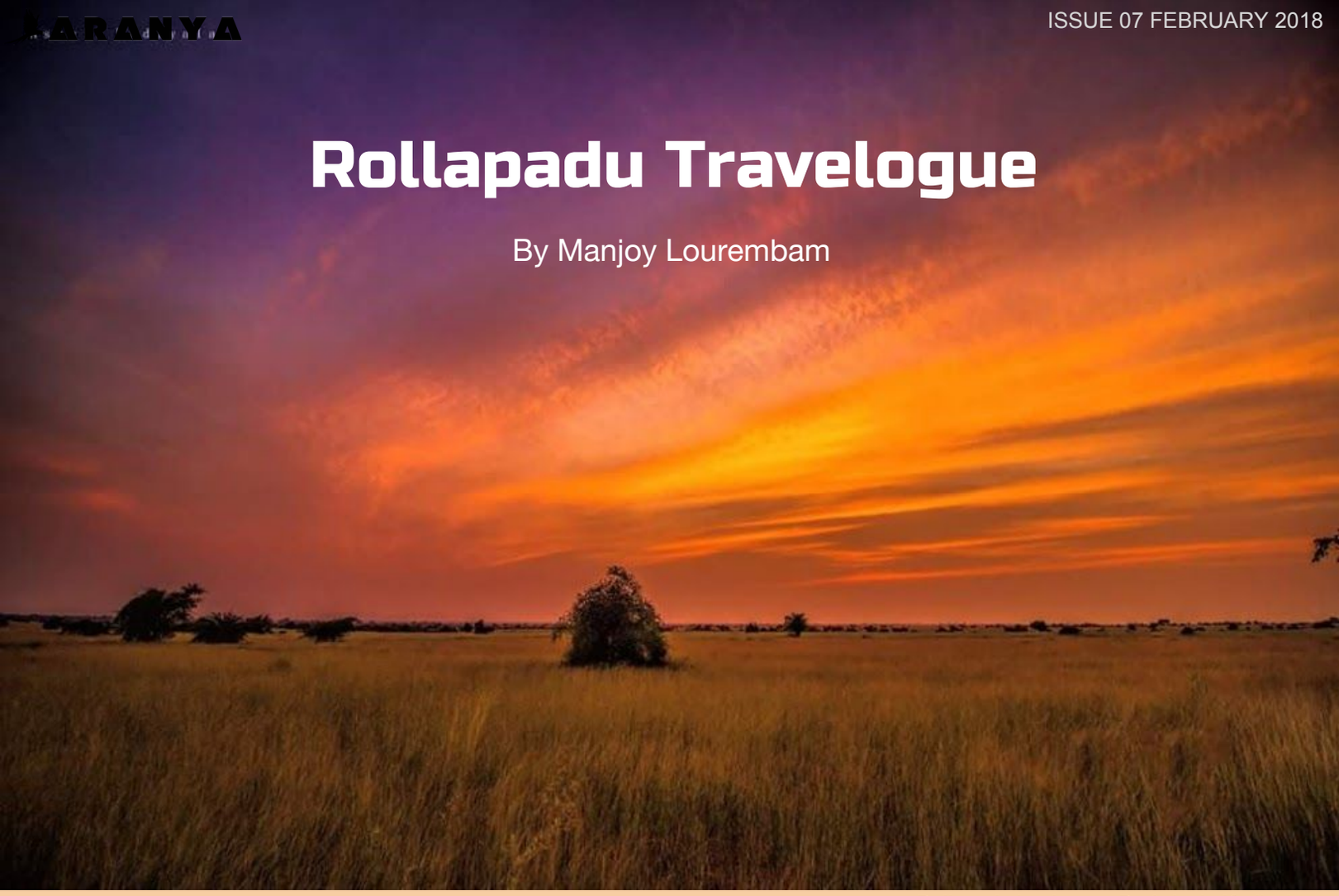
Greater Flameback *Chrysocolaptes guttacristatus*
By Mohit Joshi

Crested Serpent-Eagle *Spilornis cheela*
By Mohit Joshi

Indian Paradise-Flycatcher *Terpsiphone paradisi*
By Mohit Joshi

Rollapadu Travelogue

By Manjoy Lourembam



Rollapadu landscape By Ashwin Kadiyala

Who knew that about 200 kms away from the bustling city of Hyderabad, one would find India's own grassland attuned to that of the savannah wilderness. As we drove nearer to the plains of Rollapadu Wildlife Sanctuary, the land on both sides of the roads were both picturesque and surreal.

We drove down from Hyderabad at around 2:00 am and reached the gates of the Sanctuary at 6:15pm. The weather was perfect and with the sun in the horizon, we were right on time to catch some morning activity. For those who are not aware of this Sanctuary, the Rollapadu Wildlife Sanctuary is in the Kurnool district and is primarily a habitat of the Great Indian Bustard. Covering an area of about 6.4 square kms, the place was picture perfect with the glistening sun in the horizon and the black bucks prancing around in the grassland.

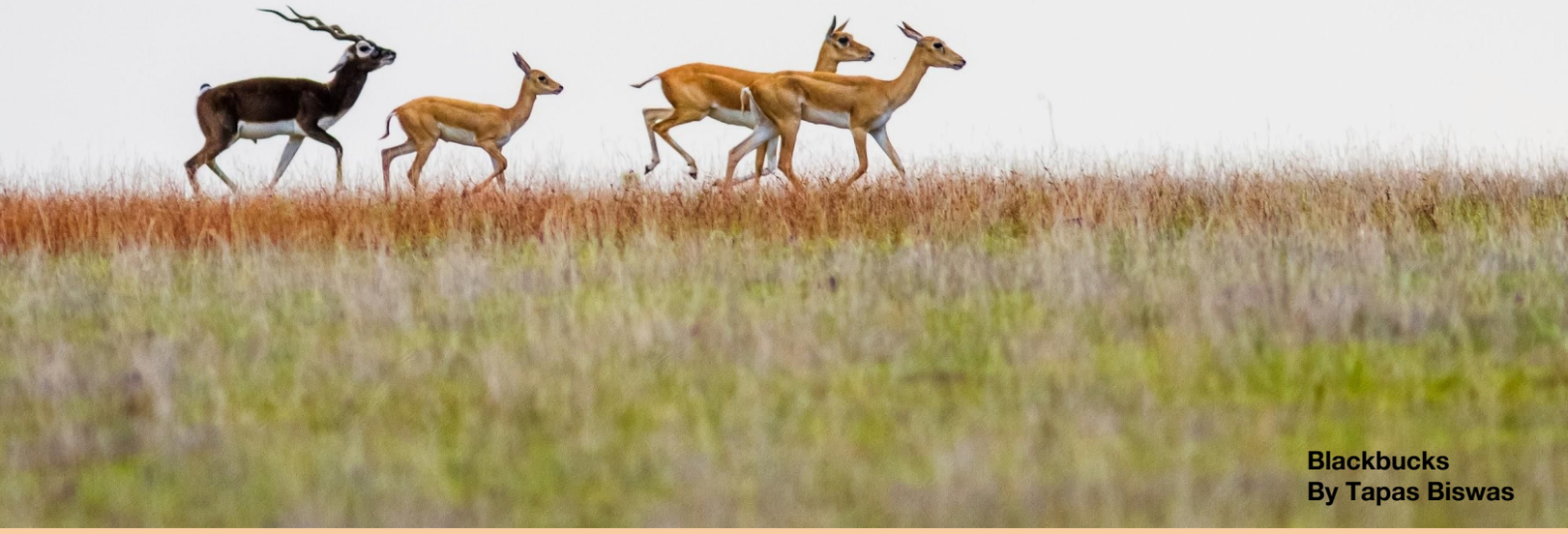
As we eagerly waited for the forest guards to give us the necessary permit for the tickets for the car, camera as well as the visitors, we could experience the burst of activity around the place. Once the formalities were over, we jumped into the car and drove off with our guide, Gaffoor bhai. The guide is a necessity. The plains here sometimes get confusing and you might end up driving around for hours together. Or you might not know where to find certain species at what time. For that we were lucky to have Gaffoor bhai.

Gaffoor bhai has been working in this sanctuary for more than 20 years and I must tell you, he is a gem. He was with us for both the days we were there. He not only took us around the place but "he had binoculars for eyes" and could spot anything anywhere.

As we headed for our first ride into the grassland, he spotted an Oriental Honey Buzzard on top of a tree about 2 kms away from where were. This raptor was perched pretty on a tree top and we were not able to locate it without our camera. Then as we drove nearer with directions from Gaffoor bhai, it flew from the treetop towards a shrub and then sat on a rock. I had to manoeuvre my car as well as get a shot of this giant bird. To our utter delight, he flew downward and perched on a rock which was just a few meters away from where I had parked the car. This was an encounter of a lifetime. We could see the giant raptor from a close distance. And we were lucky too as it would just sit there and bask in the sun scanning for a prey. We took a few shots and the results were not so bad. It sat there for a few more minutes until it took off for another destination.

It was just around 7 in the morning and there were lots of activities around us. The smaller birds like the pipits, wagtails, buntings, drongo, shrike, warblers, sandgrouses and coursers were everywhere. There were also the water birds like the painted stork, the woolly-necked stork and one black stork which got us all excited. And then there are the raptors of the sky. We also spotted harriers in large numbers. Gaffoor informed us that there was a different roosting ground of the harriers but even without going to that direction, we encountered a few on our way. They would glide in the air and land smoothly right on its prey. Then, it would perch on the mounds and eat its food. At one point we saw as many as three different types in three different directions. Imagine our dilemma! Which one to click and which one to leave out. It was one of the best birding trips and definitely the best treat ever.

Oriental Honey Buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus*
By Manjoy Lourambam



Blackbucks
By Tapas Biswas

Under the golden light, the yellow brown grassland was a sight to behold. As we drove towards the black bucks the land on both sides of the road was gleaming under the soft light. Then there was the dark beautiful antlers of the black bucks, peeking out of the yellow grass....

In the vastness of the grassland, it is easy to get lost. The tracks are hardly visible and the terrain is rough and rocky at some point and smooth and beautiful yellow and brown hues in others. Not only was it difficult to drive our way through the place, one needed a proper guide who could tell you where to find which species of bird or animal. We had already decided on what we wanted to see during this trip. So we shared our list with Gaffoor in the beginning of the trip itself.

This helped him plan the course of the day and he was able to guide us better. We watched the big birds in the early hours and then move on to the smaller ones then we moved on to black bucks prancing around and fighting towards noon and suggested we do the harriers towards the evening again.

On our way back from the morning lap of the trip, Gaffoor took us towards the reservoir where we could spot the eagle owls. It was mixed terrain and the owls had camouflaged themselves quite well. But it could not escape the seasoned eye of Gaffoor bhai and we could managed to spot a few of them. We took a few shots but since it was about a kilometer away we could not get a decent picture. After that we took off for an early lunch at 11:00 am.

Our afternoon lap of the trip started at around 3:00 pm. It was perfect, it was bright and the timing was perfect to get some easy shots of the sandgrouses and some idle black bucks. This time I did not want to take any chance.The constraints of driving and birding was too much. So I requested Gaffoor bhai to drive who was more than willing. He drove us through the sanctuary where we encountered a lot of sandgrouses and other smaller birds. We took on one at a time and ticked off almost all of our checklist. We then moved on towards the black bucks who were out on a lazy stroll. As we waited in a far corner, they started running towards one side of the grassland. This time I was lucky and could manage a not so bad jumping shot. By that time we finished, it was already time for the harriers.

By 4:30pm in the evening it was already cool and the sun was slowly moving towards the horizon and we could feel the increased in activity around us. Gaffoor quickly drove us towards the roosting ground and we could see the big birds gliding in the air. As we drove nearer, we realised that the light was against the camera and it wouldn't make a nice picture so Gaffoor bhai suggested we slowly take the car to the other side. He guided us on which side to take the car from so as to not disturb them. We drove around the small patch of land and took our position. I got one or two shots so did the others.

We returned home with the vast landscape still in our eyes. It is a unique place, worth a visit.

Blackbuck Female
By Manjoy Lourembam

New Places explored by HBP in January

Sirnapalle

Telangana 18.48°N, 78.28°E
By Harikrishna Adepu

This is a remote village which is a 30 minute drive from Kamareddy. We stopped over at Kamareddy on the evening of 26 Jan and started for Sirnapalle early at 5:30AM. The road to this place passes through a very remote village, with fields on both sides of the narrow road leading towards the Maisamma Temple (18.45°N, 78.32° E), our main hotspot. We were welcomed by half a dozen of Indian Rollers, followed by the peafowls and a Hoopoe.

We reached the temple by 6 AM, got our cameras ready and were about to begin our birding when we heard a sound, which was as if a woodpecker was drilling into the trunk of the tree. We started walking towards the direction of the sound, and, yes, my guess was right. It was a Pygmy Woodpecker.

We continued further, looking for birds in the forest patch, and were surprised to see the area was bustling with bird activity, with various species of woodpeckers, flowerpeckers, sun birds, parakeets, flycatchers, raptors to name a few. The area also hosts a variety of mammals, surprising us with a Jungle Cat, deer and wild boar, and we are sure we could see much more there and the area seems very promising for bird and wildlife lovers. As we were only two of us, we couldn't cover the entire area but this is certainly an area that needs to be explored more in future. We might have to avoid going there on sundays, as we have seen a lot of alcohol bottles and garbage around the temple, indicating the place would be filled with devotees visiting the temple on sundays, and their presence could be a disturbance for birds.

Pale-billed Flowerpecker *Dicaeum erythrorhynchos*
By Harikrishna Adipu

Jalleru Dam

Andhra Pradesh 17.29°N, 81.34°E
By Ajinkya Supekar

We were in Gubbala Mangamma for the 187th HBP birdwalk. On the second day, we decided to explore a new place nearby. A waterbody about 30 km from Aswaraopeta looked interesting. It was surrounded by forests and was quite large.

We left for the place early morning from our lodge. Thick fog covered the road making our pace slow. We hoped the fog would vanish once the sun came up. After a quick breakfast of idlis we reached the dam. In the trees lining the paddy fields, there were several Rosy Starlings. Asian Palm Swifts that flew around the dam wall, occasionally going to the palm trees. The dam had a good amount of water and waterfowl were few. On the shore a Common Kingfisher perched, other than a few cormorants and egrets, no activity was seen. The palm trees in the other side of the shore and mist gave a amazing view of the landscape. Beyond the waterline, tree covered hills started. We decided to go there.

That part was a promising place with lot of birds chirping and good tree cover on hills. As we had less time, we did not go to the hills. Meanwhile, one of us spotted Sirkeer Malkoha on a tree peeking out of the thickest. As we stopped to take a photograph, it went in the thick foliage and disappeared. Approaching close to the tree made it fly further up the hill. This concluded out trip to this new place. More time and effort will yield lot of birds from this place. And if the water in the reservoir recedes sufficiently to support waterfowl, this place is sure to be a hotspot.

Location of the reservoir

View of the reservoir By Manjula Desai

Rosy Starling *Pastor roseus*
By Manjula Desai

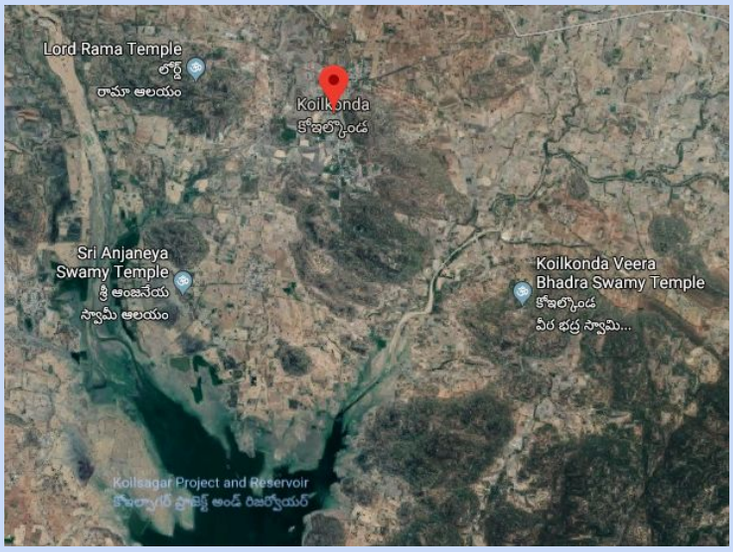
Scarlet Minivet *Pericrocotus speciosus*
By Manjula Desai

Koilakonda

Mahbubnagar, Telangana
16.76°N, 77.78°E
By Ashis Kumar Pradhan

Telangana is one of the exciting birding hotspots in India, comprising of around 30.3% of total birds reported in India. This positions Telangana in the top 19 birding hotspots among all the states in India. On the contrary, in terms of total number of checklists submitted to ebird from each state, Telangana holds 11th rank in India. In Telangana there are 11 hotspots that are reported to have more than 200 bird species and 35 hotspots to have more than 100 species. Members of Hyderabad Birding Pals (HBP) have contributed significantly in finding and reporting birds from different hotspots in and around Telangana. Since 2015, HBP members have added 27 new bird species to the total lifetime list of Telangana by conducting regular weekend bird walks and visiting unexplored areas. (All the above data was compiled from ebird)

On 19th Jan, 2018 , we (Phani, Praveen, Gopalakrishna, including me) planned to explore a new area Koilakonda which is a less explored area in Telangana in terms of birding. Koilakonda mandal comes under Mahbubnagar district, and an interesting place as it is surrounded by Krishna River on South and the northern part of Nallamala forest on south-east direction. Koilakonda is around 140 Kms from Hyderabad. We started from Hyderabad at around midnight and had a power nap after reaching Mahbubnagar town inside the car. We started birding towards cockcrow. We first opened our account with a white-eyed buzzard resting on a treetop may be waiting for the sunlight, on the way to Koilakonda fort. We reached the fort after we rescued our trapped car from a pothole with the help of a jeep. Then we were heading towards Koil Sagar Dam, on the way we stopped near a small river bed.



As we approached the river bed, first we found a grey-necked bunting on the rock. We found many cormorants, lesser whistling ducks, tree pipits, pied kingfishers, and most surprisingly 10 woolly-necked storks soaring around the river.

Woolly-necked Stork *Ciconia episcopus*
By Ashis Kumar Pradhan

Gray-necked Bunting *Emberiza buchanani*
By Ashis Kumar Pradhan

We reached Koil Sagar Dam at around 12PM. It was very hot and the dam was full of water, may be for which the activity was less. But we saw a school of fish and many cormorants, and some river terns.

Post lunch we planned to visit a place named Thimmapur (16.175163N, 77.905135E) in Gadwal and is situated near Krishna river.

There were many paddy fields near the river. We had a nice time there as we did not have to struggle to find birds, as they were coming in flocks. The activity was so amazing. The trees mostly *Acacia* were full of birds in mixed flocks of rosy starlings, tricolored munia, and weavers. We found all three weavers (Baya weaver, Streaked weaver, and Bengal Weaver) in hundreds. Each waving flock of tri-colored munia comprised of thousands of individuals.

Though we found all the previously reported birds of Telangana, I had never seen such flocks consisting of hundreds of birds which is an indication of a good potential habitat for birds and bird-watchers.

Streaked Weavers By Ashis Kumar Pradhan

This trip would not have been fruitful without Praveen who is a native to Koilakonda and was guiding us throughout our whole trip.

Flock of Rosy Starlings, Baya Weavers and Tricoloured Munias By Ashis Kumar Pradhan

Notable Sightings

Grey-headed canary-flycatcher (*Culicicapa ceylonensis*)

© Rahul Rallan

Secunderabad, Telangana

It is a rare sight in an urban habitat

Notable Sightings

Eastern Orphean Warbler (*Sylvia crassirostris*)

© Mangesh Singh Thakur

Ameenpur Lake, Hyderabad

Notable Sightings

Crab-Plover (*Dromas ardeola*)

© Aswath Singaraju

Jamnagar, Gujarat

Notable Sightings

Brown Crake (*Zapornia akool*)

© Mangesh Singh Thakur

Hyderabad, Telangana

Notable Sightings

Paddyfield Warbler (*Acrocephalus agricola*)

© Mangesh Singh Thakur

Hyderabad, Telangana

Notable Sightings

Malabar Trogon *Harpactes fasciatus*
Gubbala Mangamma, Telangana
© Guru Raju

Notable Sightings

Brown Boobook (*Ninox scutulata*)
Telangana
© Fareed Mohmed

Notable Sightings

Indian Scops-Owl (*Otus bakkamoena*)
Telangana
© Manoj Kumar Vittapu

Photographer's Corner

Jerdon's nightjar *(Caprimulgus atripennis)*
Gubbala Mangamma, Telangana

© Manjula Desai

Photographer's Corner

Dalmatian Pelican *(Pelecanus crispus)*
Nal Sarovar, Gujarat

© Jeet Aman

Photographer's Corner

Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse (*Pterocles exustus*)
Rollapadu, Andhra Pradesh

© Naresh Vadrevu

Photographer's Corner

Grey Bellied Cuckoo (*Cacomantis paserinus*)
Ameenpur Lake, Telangana

© Mangesh Singh Thakur

Photographer's Corner

Brahminy Kite (*Haliastur indus*)
Kakinada, Andhra Pradesh

© Naveen Sama

Photographer's Corner

White-eyed Buzzard (Butastur teesa)
Rollapadu, Andhra Pradesh

© Naresh Vadrevu

Photographer's Corner

Ruddy Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*)
Hope Island, Andhra Pradesh

© Sriram Reddy

Photographer's Corner

Chestnut-tailed Starling *(Sturnia malabarica)*
Manjeera Telangana

© RK Balaji

Photographer's Corner

Greater Sand Plover (*Charadrius leschenaultii*)
Hope Island, Andhra Pradesh

© Sriram Reddy

Malabar Trogon *Harpactes fasciatus*
By Sriram Reddy